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SUBJECT: JULY 26 BY-ELECTIONS PREVIEW: FOUR MORE NA SEATS  
FOR THE GNP?

Classified By: Amb. Alexander Vershbow. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: There will be a by-election on July 26 for four National Assembly seats but even Uri Party lawmakers concede there is little chance for the ruling Uri Party to win even one seat. Two of the vacant seats are in Seoul, one in Masan, Gyeongsang Province, and one in Bucheon, Gyeonggi Province, just west of Seoul. The expected result reflects the continued strong public sentiment against President Roh.  
END SUMMARY

12. (C) The Songbuk-gu district in Seoul is the only district where the Grand National Party has even a small chance of losing out to the Democratic Party (DP). Former Chairman of the minor opposition party Cho Soon-hyoung is seen as having a chance, but perhaps only to make it close. In the approval rating by party, the Uri party is in a close third, trailing right behind the Democratic Party at 14.8 percent. However, according to results from polling organization The People, the support rate for the GNP is close to 50 percent.

13. (SBU) In Songpa-gu, the GNP nominated former lawmaker Maeng Hyung-kyu to run. This move was controversial, since the race is for the seat he vacated in early 2006 to run for mayor of Seoul. In addition to this seemingly strange nomination, the GNP incurred more criticism when they first put former lawmaker Chung In-bong forward as their candidate. Chung lost his seat in 2000 when he violated the election laws by providing prostitutes and alcohol to reporters. Despite the controversial nomination, latest The People polls indicate that Maeng leads with 60 percent support.

14. (SBU) In Bucheon, between Seoul and Incheon, Kim Man-soo, a former Blue House spokesperson from the Uri Party and Cha Myung-jin from the GNP are the two candidates. Kim left the Blue House last April to prepare his run for the seat left vacant by Gyeonggi Province governor-elect Kim Moon-soo. Although not as likely as in Songbuk-gu, a close race cannot be ruled out. Polls taken July 16-17 indicate that GNP candidate Cha leads at 43 percent; however, 15 percent of respondents indicated they were undecided.

15. (SBU) In Masan, of South Gyeongsang Province, the GNP candidate, Lee Ju-Young, a former vice-governor, is in the lead despite circulating accusations of a rigged election by the former GNP incumbent. The Uri Party candidate, Kim Sung-jin, a former Blue House public administrator, has focused his campaign on emphasizing the links between his

opponent Lee Ju-Young and the allegedly corrupt GNP predecessor.

¶6. (C) According to a July 16-17 Automated Response System telephone poll conducted by the polling investigative organization, in all the districts up for grabs, the constituents' support the GNP over any other party by at least a 30 percent margin. According to Uri Party lawmaker Choi Jae-cheon, the Uri Party acknowledges that it has already conceded the four seats in the upcoming election. He noted that with the current approval ratings of the president and the Uri Party, there is little hope for a competitive race for any of the four seats.

¶7. (C) The expected victory will likely boost the rising popularity and confidence of the GNP, although the impact will not be significant. The sizeable percentage of undecided and non-affiliated voters (around 15-20 percent) reflect that it is not that there is strong public support for the GNP but that there is a lack of support for the Uri Party and political parties in general. The current break down of seats within the Assembly, excluding the four seats up for election, are as follows: 142 seats for the Uri Party; 123 seats for the GNP; 30 seats for all other parties. Even with the victory, the GNP will not obtain majority control of the National Assembly. Observers lament the GNP has yet to come up with any strong platform to elicit true support from voters.

VERSHBOW